CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INDIANS

By William Randel

Va. Historical Magazine, July 1939

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deceased of and from the before mentioned Sir John Pawlett Knight Be the right and Title to the said Land & premises derived to us or either of Us from our said late Father or from or by any other person whatsoever. TO HAVE AND TO HOLD all the said Tract or parcell of Land with the Appurtenances be the Quantity more or Less than is reputed and esteemed to him the said William Byrd Esqr. his Heirs and Assigns for ever according to those just Ancient and Legal Bounds which we or either of Us could or might Claim & demand by any Manner of Right or Title whatsoever and in as full large and ample Manner to all Intents constructions & purposes. IN WITNESS whereof We the said Theodorick & Richard Bland have hereunto set our Hands & Seals this Eleventh Day of July in the Second Year of our Sovereign Lord & Lady William & Mary by the Grace of God King and Queen of England Scotland France and Ireland Defenders of the Faith &c: And in the Year of our Lord God 1690.

Signed Sealed & delivered
in the presence of Us
Robert Bolling
Henry Randolph

RECORDED
P. H. DAVIS DCl. Cur

THEO: BLAND
[SEAL]
RICHd. BLAND
[SEAL]

Charles City County, August 4, 1690

Charles City County,
August 4, 1690.
Acknowledged in Court by the Subscribed Theodorick and Richard Bland to be their Act & Deed.
Test: Hugh Davis DCl. Cur

(To be Continued)

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INDIANS

By William Randel

In the preface to the standard edition of John Smith's works, Edward Arber calls the captain ". . . one of the best and bravest of Englishmen."[1] He saw in him not only the survivor of many fights, but an experienced man of business with an unsullied character as an English gentleman and officer. The scholar scanned every line of Smith's writings, found them consistent in all details, and concluded that the actual events of his life were just as consistent.

Aside from the Pocohantas story, which Arber relegates to its proper position as a mere episode, Smith's reputation for inveracity rests on his accounts of marvelous adventures in Eastern Europe, and not on his doings at Jamestown. Regarding the Virginia colony his story is substantially corroborated by contemporary writers, and may be trusted as an accurate account. We need not say, with Arber, that but for Smith the nation might never have been founded, but we must admit that the survival of Jamestown rested on him as the life and energy of the whole Plantation.

It was no easy matter for a group of civilized men to set up residence in a virtual wilderness. Many had braved our rough eastern coast only to fail. The colonies at Roanoke and Popham had come to nothing. To the rigors of life in the open was added the menace of the natives. Inexperience, poor discipline, and internal strife and jealousy were other deterrents to success. What then made Jamestown survive when others failed? It may justly be laid to Smith, who acted when his colleagues were irresolute, and almost alone pursued a vigorous policy toward the Indians. Had he died or left before the arrival of the second supply, the colony might well have succumbed. That he was sent home was unfortunate, but his great work was done, though not appreciated at the time.

[1] Smith, *Works*, preface, ix. The text used throughout this paper is *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. by Edward Arber, revised by A. G. Bradley, 2 vols., Edinburgh, John Grant, 1910.

Perhaps without realizing it, Smith acted toward the Indians in a very wise way. He was friendly toward them, but never let them forget the might of English weapons. He courteously declined to go unarmed in their midst. He was quick to punish thieves and other malefactors, and was stern in his measures when occasion demanded. Realizing that the very existence of the colony depended on peace, he never thought of trying to exterminate the natives. Only after his departure were there bitter wars and massacres, the natural results of a more hostile policy.

In his writings, Smith reveals the attitudes behind his actions. Because he was friendly to the Indians, we may expect to find remarks concerning their good qualities, and because he was at times their stern opponent, some mention of their vices is naturally included. On the prevalence of one sort over the other would be based any conclusion of Smith's dominant attitude.

Not all of Smith's works need be examined. The last four books he wrote are not concerned primarily with America. Of the six others, some merely repeat what has been said before, and require only cursory attention. The *True Relation* (1608) gives an account of his Virginia adventures just after their completion. The *Map of Virginia* (1612) describes the geography and inhabitants. The *Description of New England* (1616) optimistically reports the commercial advantages and opportunities of that region. The two *New England Trials* (1620 and 1622) are glowing accounts of success in fisheries and trading, while the *General History* (1624) contains a composite review of both regions, chiefly revisions of his earlier reports. Besides presenting views of both Virginia and New England, these works provide a contemporary account and also a retrospective picture after the lapse of sixteen years.

When the colony was first established at Jamestown, it had little fore-knowledge of what its treatment would be at the hands of the natives. Smith was entrusted with Indian affairs. Having no prejudices, but yet being very cautious, he felt them out as he explored the countryside. When they, doubtless playing the same game of caution, were friendly to Smith, he returned the compliment. The *True Relation* abounds in mention of kindly treatment at the hands of the natives.

". . . the people in all places kindely intreating us, dauncing and feasting us with strawberries, Mulberies, Bread, Fish and other their Countrie provisions wherof we had plenty. . . ."[2]

Again, on the same trip,

"The next day the Queene of *Agamatack* kindely intreated us, her people being no lesse contented than the rest, and from thence to another place . . . where the people shewed us the manner of their diving for Mussels, in which they finde Pearles."[3]

In the first Fall at Jamestown, supplies began to run low,

". . . and shortly after it pleased God (in our extremity) to move the Indians to brings us corne, ere it was halfe ripe, to refresh us, when we rather expected when they would destroy us."[4]

At the outset of his greatest adventure, his capture by Powhatan's warriors, Smith was further made aware of benevolent regard.

". . . towards the evening certaine Indians haled me, one of them being of *Chikahamania,* offered to conduct me to his country. . . ."[5]

". . . the second day I arived at *Mamanahuot,* where the people having heard of my comming, were ready with 3 or 400 baskets little and great."[6]

When the rivers became too shallow for his barge to proceed further, Smith with two soldiers went on in a canoe, leaving the larger body in the barge. He remarks that this action would probably be condemned as indiscreet,

". . . yet if they well consider the frienship of the Indians in conducting me. . . ."[7]

he thinks he would be justified.

His rashness was rewarded by his being captured, only his presence of mind preventing his death. When his companions were killed, Smith seized a warrior and used him as a shield. Once before Powhatan, he diverted that worthy's attention by showing him his compass and discoursing of astronomy.

[2] *True Relation,* p. 6.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 7.
[4] *Ibid.,* p. 8.
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 11.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 12.
[7] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

"I presented him with a compasse diall, describing by my best meanes the use thereof: whereat he so amazedly admired, as he suffered me to proceed in a discourse of the roundness of the earth, the course of the sunne, moone, starres and plannets.

With kind speeches and bread he requited me. . . . I expected when they would execute me, yet they used me with what kindness they could."[8]

"The King tooke great delight in understanding the manner of our ships, and sayling the seas, the earth and skies, and of our God: what he knew of the dominions he spared not to acquaint me with. . . ."[9]

During his period of imprisonment, the kindness continued.

". . . a quarter of venison and some ten pound of bread I had for supper: what I left was reserved for me, and sent with me to my lodging. Each morning 3. women presented me three great platters of fine bread, more venison than ten men could devour I had: my gowne, points and garters, my compas and my tablet they gave me again. Though 8 ordinarily guarded me, I wanted not what they could devise to content me: and still our longer acquaintance increased our better affection."[10]

After being sent around to several other tribes, as if on exhibition, Smith was sent home. But even then the benevolence did not cease.

"The Empereur *Powhatan,* each week once or twice, sent me many presents of Deare, bread; halfe alwayes for my father whom he much desired to see, and halfe for me. . . ."[11]

The "father" here mentioned is Newport, the leader. It is possible that Smith owed his release to his invention of the story that he was son to the colony's leader. By treating him kindly, Powhatan may have hoped to persuade Newport to visit him in person. He repeatedly urged Smith to make another visit, which at length he did, receiving the same sort of treatment.

"Being entred the house, with loude tunes they all made signes of great joy. This proude salvage, having his finest women, and the principall of his chiefe men assembled, sate in rankes as before is expressed: himself as upon a throne

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 15.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 23.

at the upper end of the house, with such a Majesty as I cannot express, nor yet have often seene, either in Pagan or Christian. With kinde countenance he bad me welcome, and caused a place to be made by himself to sit. . . ."[12]

". . . with a lowd oration he proclaimed me *Awerowanes* of *Powhatan,* and that all his subjects should so esteeme us. . . . The King rising from his seat, conducted me forth, and caused each of my men to have as much more bread as hee could beare: giving me some in a basket. . . . Victuals you must know is all there wealth, and the greatest kindness they could shew us."[13]

Beyond these passages are a few others in the *True Relation* whose interpretation is too doubtful for quotation. The same is true of the very few passages in the other works that hint at kindness.

Besides these excerpts revealing benevolence, there are several which praise the physical superiority of the Indians. Smith was continually astounded at their endurance and hardiness. During his captivity he asked Powhatan to have a letter taken to the fort.

"This he granted and sent three men, in such weather as in reason were impossible by any naked man to be endured."[14]

Once when Smith's canoe was stuck in the muck, probably stranded by an ebb tide, the Indians first offered to carry him ashore, then brought him what was needed for his bodily comfort.

"Each presently gave his helpe to satisfie my request, which paines a horse would scarce have indured: yet a couple of bells richly rewarded them." (Later an officer of the king came out to the canoe.) ". . . he no more scrupulous than the rest seemed to take a pride in showing how little he regarded that miserable cold and durty passage, though a dogge would scarce have indured it. This kindnes I found, when I little expected less than a mischiefe."[15]

The other statements acknowledge this virtue of hardiness.

"They are very strong, of an able body and full of agilitie, able to endure to lie in the woods under a tree by the fire, in the worst of winter, or in the weedes and grasse, in Ambuscado in the summer."[16]

12 *Ibid.,* p. 24.
13 *Ibid.,* pp. 25-26.
14 *Ibid.,* p. 17.
15 *Ibid.,* p. 29.
16 *General History,* p. 361.

painting and oyntments so tanne their skinnes, that after a yeare or two, no weather will hurt them."[17]

Nor did Smith find Powhatan to be any softer than his subjects.

"He is of personage a tall well proportioned man, with a sower looke, his head somewhat grey . . . his age near sixtie, of a very able and hardy body to endure any labor."[18]

Powhatan's children are also of fine appearance. Smith considered

". . . his sonne Nantaquans, the most manliest, comliest, boldest spirit, I ever saw in a Salvage, and his sister Pocahontas, the Kings most deare and wel-beloved daughter. . . ."[19]

". . . a child of tenne yeares old: which, not only for feature, countenance, and proportion, which exceedeth any of the rest of his people: but for wit and spirit, the only *Nonpariel* of his Country. . . ."[20]

In commenting on the various tribes in Virginia, Smith says ome are larger than others, but they are

". . . generally tall and straight, of a comely proportion. "Their women (they say) are easily delivered of childe, yet do they love children very dearely. To make them hardy, in the coldest mornings they wash them in the rivers, and by . . ."[21]

The largest of all were the Susquehannas.

". . . 60 of those Sasquesahanocks came to us with skins, Bowes, Arrows . . . for presents. Such great and well proportioned men are seldome seene, for they seemed like Giants to the English, yes and to the neighbors, yet seemed of an honest and simple disposition, with much adoe restrained from adoring us as Gods."[22]

The above quoted passages are the most important ones to be und, and they also are representative of the scattered few not corded. In addition to these evidences of positive praise, another type of statement indicates Smith's partisanship on the side

17 *Ibid.,* p.363.
18 *Ibid.,* p. 375.
19 *General History,* p. 530.
20 *True Relation,* p. 38.
21 *General History,* p. 361.
22 *Ibid.,* p. 350. This passage is evidence to Dr. Elsie Murray that the squehannas were the originals of the "noble savage." *Scientific Monthly,* arch, 1933, pp. 250-257.

of the Indians. Arguing for aggressive steps in New England, Smith tells of the wretched condition of the "poore salvages," "those poore innocent soules," in the hands of Spaniards and French. The English, he believed, should find the effort of converting them well worth the trouble, for they are deserving of salvation. No man with a mortal hatred for the Indians would be likely to argue for their conversion.

It was in the nature of the situation that not all of Smith's dealings with the Indians should be pleasant. When stern measures were provoked, Smith's reports no longer praised the Indians, but quite the reverse. Incidents arose that made him quite angry with them, and his adjectives followed the course of his feelings. Numerically, his remarks in dispraise of the natives nearly approximate those in their favor, which suggests a somewhat similar division or alternation in his sentiments. The remarks that put the Indians in a bad light allude for the most part to mere unfriendly behavior, or to positive hostility or treachery. A few scattered references give witness to the insolence and indolence, the cruelty and cowardice of the savages.

In several cases the hostility was open. At the first landing of the settlers there was one skirmish, from which the natives withdrew only when their arrows were all spent.[23] On one of the early reconnoitring expeditions, certain outward signs of unfriendliness were the means of discovering a catastrophe.

> "That night passing by *Weanock* . . . they according to their former churlish condition, seemed little to affect us, but . . . the people the next morning seemed kindely to content us, yet we might perceive many signs of a more Jealousie in them than before. . . . This gave us some occasion to doubt some mischiefe at the Fort. . . ."[24]

Their fears were founded in fact, for when they turned back they found that an attack had been made, with one boy killed and several men wounded. They immediately erected palisades to prevent any recurrence of the event.

During Smith's captivity, only on untoward incident ruffled the otherwise perfect pleasurable calm. The father of a warrior

23 *True Relation*, p. 5.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Smith had slaim sought revenge at the sword's point, but the guards intervened, saving his life.[25]

All hostility was not in open warfare. Certain tribes, notably the Paspaheghans, never were anything but rude to the English.

> "The people so scornefully entertained us, as with what signes of scorne and discontent we could, we departed. . . ."[26]

Possibly this was because they were enemies of Powhatan. When once in their presence a man volunteered to guide Smith to Powhatan, the warriors hooted in derision.

Unfriendliness also took the form of treachery, which especially roused the ire of our author.

> "In my returne to *Paspahegh,* I traded with that churlish and treacherous nation; having loaded 10 or 12 bushels of corne, they offred to take our pieces and swords, yet by stelth, but (we) seeming to dislike it, they were ready to assault us."[27]

Another of this tribe led the English on a wild-goose chase to a place where there were reported to be men in English clothing.[28] On still another trip of exploration, suspicions were roused by the actions of the guides. Small things

> ". . . caused me to suspect some mischiefe . . . and knowing by experience the most of their courages to procede from others feare, I intermingled the Kings sonne . . . and his chiefemen amongst ours."[29]

thus preventing any wanton attack.

As time passed, even Powhatan came under Smith's suspicion. This chieftan urged the white men to discard their weapons when in his presence, pointing out that the Indians were totally unarmed. Smith's words at this juncture have a rather bitter ring.

> ". . . experience had well taught me to beleeve his friendship till opportunity suffred him to betray us. . . ."[30]

And again when Powhatan suggested a trip up-river as a possible route to the South Sea, Smith says that is something

25 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
27 *True Relation*, p. 11.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
29 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
30 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

". . . which will not be without treacherie, if wee ground our content upon his constancie."[31]

Even when Powhatan expressed a wish that he might see England, Smith construes it with a strong bias.

". . . the cause, I assure me, was to know our strength and countries condition."[32]

Three incidents seemed to Smith to be positive evidences of treachery. A Paspahegan showed a glittering stone to the colonists and offered to guide a party to a quarry filled with the like. A little distance from the fort they demanded more ample details, but he became evasive and finally insulting. When it became apparent that he was deceiving them, they gave him twenty lashes.[33]

At a later time two painted Indians danced about the author as though about to club him like a rabbit. When they saw it had offended him, they at once begged his pardon in good terms, and asked for one of their tribe within the fort that they might punish him. When such a one was found, however, they turned on Smith who was driven to locking them up before he could subdue them.[34]

On two occasions the inclination to steal is censured by Smith.

"At our Fort, the tooles we had, were so ordinarily stolen by the Indians, as necessity inforced us to correct their braving theeverie: for he that stole today, durst come againe the next day. . . Their custome is to take any thing they can ceaze. . . ."[35]

"The next exploit was an Indian having stolen an Axe, was so pursued by Maister *Scrivener* and them next him, as he threw it downe: and flying, drew his bow at any that durst incounter him."[36]

Powhatan ostensibly frowned upon stealing, on one occasion sending a man thirty miles to return a hatchet.[37]

In language somewhat milder Smith speaks of other sorts of unpraiseworthy habits in the *General History,* written when his intense personal feelings no longer colored the wording. He speaks disparagingly of certain phases of the Indians' religion.

31 *Ibid.,* p. 29.
32 *Ibid.,* p. 31.
33 *True Relation,* p. 39.
34 *Ibid.,* p. 35.
35 *Ibid.,* pp. 32-33.
36 *Ibid.,* p. 35.
37 *Ibid.,* p. 33.

"The faces of all their Priests are painted as ugly as they can devise . . . sometimes (the leader) maketh invocations with broken sentences by starts and strange passions; and at every pause, the rest give a short groane."[38]

These priests also have duties to perform during great storms.

"Their Conjurers runne to the watersides . . . after many hellish outcries and invocations, they cast Tobacco, Copper, *Pocones,* or such trash into the water to pacify that God. . . ."[39]

This propensity to make noise is observed also in their manner of making battle. Smith once had the good fortune to witness a sham battle, the tribe dividing into two parts.

"Upon the first flight of arrowes they gave such horrible shouts and screeches as so many infernal hell hounds could not have made more terrible."[40]

But they also had rattles, something like drums, and made in five different pitches.

"When they mix their rattles with their voyces . . . (they) make such a terrible noise as would affright . . . any man."[41]

Smith's account of the barbarous method of punishing enemies and malefactors is a fitting paragraph with which to wind up this parade of quotations.

"For example, he caused certaine malefactors to be bound hand and foot, then having of many fires gathered great store of burning coales, they rake these coales round in the form of a cock-pit, and in the midst they cast the offenders to broyle to death. Sometimes he causeth the heads of them that offend him, to be laid upon the altar or sacrificing stone, and one with clubbes beats out their braines. When he would punish any notorious enemy or malefactor, he causeth him to be tyed to a tree, and with Mussell shels or reeds, the executioner cutteth off his joynts one after another, ever casting what they cut into the fire, then doth he proceed with shels and reeds to case the skinne from his head and face, then doe they rip his belly and so burne him with the tree and all."[42]

38 *General History,* p. 372.
39 *Ibid.,* p. 373.
40 *General History,* p. 368.
41 *Ibid.,* p. 368.
42 *Ibid.,* p. 377.

Those who are acquainted with David Garnett's *Pocahontas* may see in this passage the elements of the second chapter of that book, which is unexcelled for horror mixed with sheer beauty.

The tenor of Smith's writing changed through the years. When he wrote the *True Relation* his active life was at its height, and his writing was accordingly full of action. The *General History,* composed near the close of his activity, reveals the contemplative man, living in a past far more glorious than the bitter present. His rancor and enthusiasm alike are largely gone; in sad but accurate calmness he describes what he can recall, refreshing his memory by perusing his earlier works. The last twenty pages of the *General History* are significant as a final statement of Smith's attitude toward the Indians. A dozen phrases speak in their praise, another dozen in their disfavor, while sixty-nine paragraphs, are couched in neutral terms of pure description. These cover the whole range of Indian lore, touching on their disposition, attire, possessions, numbers, diet, ornaments, buildings, gardens, industry, language, manufactures, methods of hunting and fighting, medicine and surgery, music and entertainment, religion, burial, temples, priests, ceremonies, sacrifices, government, order of succession, and many less important subjects.

At the conclusion Smith adds these words that go far to explain his motives and attitudes.

> "And this is as much as my memory can call to minde worthy of note: which I have purposely collected, to satisfie my friends of the true worth and qualitie of Virginia."[43]

This suggests one reason for the omission of any extensive dispraise in this his largest work. In his capacity as "real-estate promoter" he would try to avoid too many unpleasant details. But the remarks about his slanderers and critics who themselves never ventured beyond the security of the stockade offer a hint at least that part of his motive was to vindicate himself.

In summary, it must be concluded that Smith was never wholly blind to the good points of the Indians, even when actively opposing them. It is true that continued skirmishes embittered his statements toward the close of the *True Relation,* which has rather more of dispraise than praise. But he soon regained his temper,

[43] *General History,* p. 378.

and throughout the rest of his writings remained remarkably impartial, with a few remarks *pro,* about as many *con,* but with the vast majority uncolored one way or the other. He never used the Indians to excuse his own failures, perhaps because the real reasons were all too obvious to permit concealment. His kind treatment at the hands of Powhatan, for whatever ulterior purpose it may have been tendered, impressed him so deeply that he never completely condemned the savages, limiting his words of dispraise to occasions when their worst natures were displayed. In unambiguous prose he reports what he saw, and his was a rare opportunity for close observation. His reputation as a teller of tall tales, hinging as it does on somewhat tenuous proof, need not in the last analysis deter us from considering Smith a candid, liberal, and fair reporter of the Indians.